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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC
RHEFAFM/CDRAFMIC FT DETRICK MD
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 001868

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FAS/CMP/DLP WETZEL AND MAGGINNIS
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SUBJECT: CROATIA: AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE: NOVEMBER
23 AND RESONSE TO INFORMATION REQUEST

REF: A) STATE 209622 B) ZAGREB 1836 AND PREVIOUS

SUMMARY: As of November 23, no additional cases of
H5N1 have been confirmed in Croatia. In response to
ref A, Post is providing responses to questions
concerning the GOC's efforts to control avian
influenza (AI) and capability to respond to an
influenza pandemic in its weekly update report. END
SUMMARY

A) Preparedness and Communications

The GOC has a strategy for preventing and containing
pandemic influenza, which is outlined in their
national preparedness plan. This plan was prepared
using WHO and EU guidelines and is available online
at <http://www.vlada.hr/Download/2005/10/26/2.pdf>
Post believes the GOC is capable of implementing the
plan. Post will forward an English translation of
the plan when it becomes available. Dr. Gjenero-
Margan, Director of Epidemiology and Infectious
Disease at the Croatian Institute for Public Health,
said that national laws would not pose barriers to
detection, containment or response measures.

To date, the GOC has been very transparent in
reporting cases of avian influenza (AI) in animals
and Post expects that transparency would continue in
the event of an outbreak in people. Croatia is a
small country with a good telecommunications
infrastructure and a free and vocal press. Post
feels these factors also contribute to continued
transparency related to AI.

Avian influenza is a priority for the GOC. Top
leaders including the Prime Minister and the
Ministers for Health and Agriculture have spoken
publicly about the need to be vigilant against the
threat of AI. The Ministry of Agriculture currently
has the lead on AI in Croatia and Agricultural
Minister Petar Cobankovic is an appropriate high-
level political interlocutor. Currently, the
technical lead is Assistant Minister Mate Brstilo,
Veterinary Directorate, Ministry of Agriculture.

The GOC is working with international organizations

such as FAO, OIE, WHO and EU (specifically the Dutch) on AI. The GOC informally asked for and is receiving technical assistance from the Netherlands. Post believes the GOC would be receptive to US assistance offers through either a bilateral or multilateral approach.

Gjenero-Margan said that Croatia purchases approximately 550,000 trivalent flu shots per year from foreign vaccine producers. Flu shots are elective and are recommended to high-risk patients (such as the elderly). In the case of an adverse reaction to a mandatory vaccine, cases are referred to the Ministry of Health for investigation and compensation. Gjenero-Margan was unsure of the protocol for adverse reactions to voluntary vaccines such as the flu shot. Nor did she know whether Croatia provides liability shields to foreign vaccine producers.

The public appears to be well-informed about AI, although media interest in AI has waned since the initial discovery of H5N1. For the most part, headlines and photos are sensationalistic, but reporting is largely factual. GOC officials including the PM and Ministers of Health and Agriculture have also spoken publicly about the risk of AI. The Ministry of Agriculture has published AI pamphlets for the agricultural sector and uses a network of field offices and veterinarians to disseminate information on animal diseases to rural areas. The City of Zagreb published an AI pamphlet for the general public, but it is unclear whether

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this pamphlet reached a broader audience outside of the capital.

B) SUREVEILLANCE AND DETECTION

The GOC feels it has demonstrated its ability to quickly detect a new strain of influenza among animals. The PM was quoted in the press touting the speed with which the GOC identified H5N1 in migratory birds and responded, thereby preventing the virus from spreading to domestic poultry. Croatia does not have any endemic infectious diseases that consume a majority of its resources. Currently, the Veterinary Directorate uses old but accurate technology to subtype viruses found in samples. If the H5 subtype is identified, the samples are then sent to the EC reference lab for further testing. Croatia is a member of WHO's FluNet. Croatia's National Influenza Center collects an average of 1200 samples and forwards approximately four to five representative isolates to WHO reference labs a season.

The GOC is expecting a new real time reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) machine in the next few weeks. The RT-PCR machine will help them more rapidly test the thousands of samples from the field. The GOC is also interested in obtaining a DNA purifier machine to identify virus subtypes.

C) RESPONSE AND CONTAINMENT

In response to the three initial instances of H5N1, the GOC's response was very rapid and the guidelines for culling and increasing biosafety measures were quickly implemented. Post will report on antiviral and personal protective equipment supplies in septel.

Gjenero-Margan said that while quarantine and social distancing are options for response, they are not

considered very effective measures. She considers the use of anything but voluntary isolation highly unlikely in the event of a pandemic and stated that who would carry out these measures has not been decided.

DELAWARE